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Myth, Miracle and Midrash

A DISCOURSE
BY
EMIL G. HIRSCH

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MYTH, MIRACLE AND MIDRASH

Goethe tells us that "das Wunder its des Glaubens liebstes Kind." In the spirit of his times and a true exponent of their philosophy he insists that the miracles recorded in the ancient documents of the synagogue and the church partake of the character of free inventions. According to his theory which is even at the present day shared by many, they have sprung from the prolific womb of faith. He inverts, as is easily seen, the commonly defended doctrine which would have faith rest on miracles. He suggests, therefore, the thought that miracles cannot corroborate the contentions of faith, but that the acceptance of miracles presupposes the dominant influence of faith. Undoubtedly this view is the truer. In Lessing's Nathan the same construction reappears in the dialogue between the titular figure of the play and his foster daughter. She maintains that her rescue was wrought through the invention of an angel sent by God on this errand. The wiser mind of the maturer and far-traveled man sees through her conceit. He detects in it the fruitage of her nurse's training. Had she not been taught to believe in the existence of angelic mediators, her escape from the greed of fire would not have impressed her as the direct interference willed by God. It is his calm confidence that the greatest miracle and wonder is that the mighty manifestations of wondrous power by which we are surrounded everywhere become so familiar to us as to lose for us the import of the miraculous.

Nathan's thesis carries, indeed, a telling point. Just now, when in the full flush of our wealth of intimate communications with nature we are apt to overlook the unyielding limitations of our knowledge of nature's fundamentals, the caution uttered by the high-priest of religious tolerance might with profit be laid to our heart.

It is not true that the sciences have lifted the curtain of mystery from off the face of creation. The wisest among us is at his best imprisoned on an island of no wide area, surrounded on all sides by an ocean screened by impenetrable banks of fog. The beating of the tide upon the shore, and driftwood cast up from the unseen immensity beyond, encourage the imagination intent upon construing from a few fragments the plan of the unexplored waste; but more than such provisional because anticipatory vision into hidden things and currents even the bold sciences of the present day do not vouchsafe to never so devoted a courtier of their secrets. If mystery be the groundwork upon which faith builds its altars, and unexplored depths invite its miracle-fed assurance, there is not the least excuse for holding that the exact sciences have put an end to the dominion of religion, or closed forever the portals of its wonder palace. The clear thinker has no doubts that the sciences themselves have resort to faith as intently as have the creeds of the world. Matter and force, the conservation of energy, atom and molecule and molecular affinities; the very hypothesis of evolution through natural selection; the genesis of life and the production of thought, the chemical substratum of consciousness and similar concepts or operations which are the stock phrases and familiar contentions of modern scientific reasoning, are, if examined to their ultimate elements, airy, thought-

woven assumptions of the human mind. The sciences presuppose as vital an imagination as does faith; they make as heavy drafts upon the store of our credulity as does the *credo* or the metaphysics of the church, the synagogue, and the mosque.

But religion to be true to her mission in these days of growing knowledge cannot bar her territory against the inroads of reason. Reason is indeed unable to explain all that presses upon our curiosity with the demand for an account of its rise and development, of its purpose or destiny. "There are more things between heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." But the irrepressible passion resident in the breast of man for an harmonious interpretation of the universe and of life will not admit that two conflicting and mutually contradictory theories purporting both to hold the key to the unread arcana or the known facts of nature and fate, can be both true. Modern thought has convinced itself of the truth that the world is under the dominion of law. Order and regularity of sequence between cause and effect are the postulates of the assumption that one law reigns in the heights and in the depths. The suspension of that law for whatever end in view would not be evidence of omniscience or omnipotence. Thinkers have no difficulty to establish this proposition.

An all-wise Creator must have foreseen in the hour of the creation the future necessities calling for the modification of the general law; if he did not possess this insight he cannot be credited with omniscience. But if he had this anticipatory knowledge of the insufficiency of his general and ordinary provisions and nevertheless neglected to so amend them that at the proper crisis they would respond spontaneously to the emergency, his

only alternative left is the denial of omnipotence to the creative energy. On either horn of the dilemma the belief in miracles suffers irreparable and fatal havoc. A God who cannot foresee that his original laws will not operate to carry out his intentions under all circumstances lacks omniscience; a God who foreseeing this defect cannot so arrange his work as to meet the future emergency lacks omnipotence. The appeal to God's omnipotence for which there is neither limitation nor impossibility cannot be admitted in rebuttal. For inherent in our idea of God is the necessity of His acting reasonably. Our God cannot be swayed by whim or caprice. The supreme law-giver is himself under the law. Law and liberty are not mutually exclusive. Slavery involves obedience to a law which is contrary to our highest nature. Liberty roots in compliance with the law which corresponds to the essential exposition of our own being. Compulsion is absent in freedom, not so the voluntary and spontaneous execution of the inherent necessities under which our life to be complete must be lived.

In God there is law and freedom, in Him both are identical. A lawless God is inconceivable. The omnipotence of God is not of one fibre with its popular misconception which makes it the equivalent of the license to do according to unrestricted pleasure. An all-powerful God will not and cannot turn water into wine or suspend the operation of the law of gravitation. *"Ha-Yad Adhonay tikzar?"* is, if adduced to decide this problem, at once answered by every one who understands what the philosophical concept of the deity implies, in the negative. God cannot undo and deny himself. The very implications of the idea of God reject this possibility as not within the range of his power. Being the

lawgiver he is himself under his own law. The good old Talmudists so often misunderstood and undervalued, especially by such as know of them and their thoughts only from hearsay, had already this appreciation of the implications inherent in the God-idea. Much fun has been poked at them for having discussed the to us more than empty question whether God observes the minutiæ of the rabbinical ritual code, and for having indulged in the to them by no means fanciful descriptions of God studying the law in accordance with the approved canons of rabbinical disputations and wearing the prescribed phylacteries. Eisenmenger and his followers both among the non-Jews and the Jews have not been slow to call attention to these well-nigh blasphemous vagaries and exuberances of rabbinical impudence as they chose to style them. But to my mind these Haggadic speculations betray on the part of their authors a deep appreciation of the philosophic thought that God as the giver of the law is by the very essence of his Godhood inherently bound by that law. This throws a new light on the oft-quoted but only rarely correctly apprehended "nomistic" character of the rabbis' God-idea.

But be this as it may, certain it is that Judaism in all of its phases attributed little if any evidential force to miracles. The attentive reader of the old law bearing on the credit to be given a claimant of prophetic powers will recall without much difficulty proof abundant to this fact. The "Torah is not in heaven and it is not beyond the sea." In the decisions of disputed rabbinical applications of the law, supernatural signs and portents played no part. They were rejected. This is clearly shown in the well-known passage (Baba Metzia 59 b) where the experience of Rabbi Elieser is recorded, who, thrice appealing to miraculous phenomena which

he provoked, found his contentions none the less emphatically rejected by the assembled teachers. Even the heavenly voice "Bath Kol" was not accorded a vote in that court. Of course, the Biblical record remembers a multitude of miraculous happenings. The rabbinical writings are in turn not poor in stories of men who exercised what we may call miraculous control over the stores of nature. The rabbinical Rip-Van-Winkle 'Honiah, the "circle-man," is probably well known to even you as the commander of the clouds. But the rabbis felt the difficulties unavoidably involved in the assumption of an arbitrary interference on the part of God with the laws of creation, and in order to dull their edge taught that whatever is chronicled as such came to pass in obedience to a condition imposed in the very act of creation. The Red Sea, for instance, was *in the beginning* so constituted as to divide before the fleeing host of Israel when Moses lifted up his staff. Jonah's fish was created with the destiny to save the truant fugitive from God's commission (Tan'hum Toldoth Noah). In this way the rabbis obviated the dilemma analyzed above. The miracle ceased, in fact, to be a miracle; the event occurred in consequence of a fore-ordained natural law. The law of nature was not suspended nor violated. One who is acquainted with much of the latest Christian literature on this mooted matter knows that in taking this position the teachers of the rabbinical school anticipated the reasoning of the most modern spokesmen and writers on apologetics in what is called the new orthodoxy in church circles.

The esteem in which workers of miracles were held by the rabbis was not of a very high order (Sabbath 53). Even pious 'Honia was rebuked by Simon b. Sheta'h for misleading the people (Ta'anith 23). Throughout Tal-

mudic and also the later philosophical writings of the Middle Ages the tendency is clearly indicated to find wherever possible a natural explanation for the miracles or to interpret them as allegories. Abarbanel, for instance, does not scruple to say that the story of Jonah's lodging in the fish's belly was a dream which the prophet had. Such stories as represent God's appearance to men in the guise of an angel, a human being, a devouring fire, or seated on a wonderfully splendid throne, were held to have originated in the imagination of the beholder. (Jebhamoth, 49 b., Maimonides Moreh II, 43; Yesodhe Hattorah I, 9; and Einhorn Ner Tamid, p. 13.) In Albo's *Ikkarim* (III, 8) the incident of the burning bush is explained on this basis. And when the old interpreters failed in this manner to naturalize or allegorize the Biblical story they sometimes would indicate their doubt in an unmistakable manner. (See Yoma 54, b.) Not to lose myself in a haystack of quotations, I must forego further citations from our mediæval authorities. One statement, however, by Maimonides deserves to be recalled. He emphasizes the fact that according to our religion never can a miracle affect the moral nature of man. Catastrophical conversions in consequence of sudden marvelous illumination are therefore excluded. And this is a distinction which Jewish orthodoxy when contemplating Christian revivalism may well accentuate. On still another point Maimonides is equally strenuous. The laws of nature are permanent. Never by miracle is the fundamental order of creation interrupted.

But what is our attitude? Do we belong to the blind and unquestioning believers that accept the written word of the Biblical stories without inquiry; or shall we range ourselves under the banner of the rationalists; or

reject the stories as idle if not intriguing inventions palmed off for purposes of a questionable moral nature upon a credulous people; or shall we hold that these stories are fundamentally the productions of minds incapable of recording what they saw because diseased and subject to hallucinations? For all of these widely variant assumptions defenders have arisen both within and without the household of Israel. Believers who ask not and inquire not, notwithstanding the better example set to them by the old teachers of the rabbinical times whose words I have in part quoted, are by no means in the minority among the present day Jews. For, bear in mind, it is absolute folly to hold that we American Jews constitute the preponderating party and have therefore the right to maintain that what we declare to be the tenets of modern Judaism has universal currency as such.

Those who would excommunicate one or the other congregation for what they choose to denominate its heresis, might have a care lest others visit the same fate upon their head. If questions of orthodox belief must be submitted to the arbitrament of the census, every one is bound to concede that the belief in miracles is an article of faith in modern Israel. Those who accept whatever story the Bible may contain as literally true, to doubt which would be blasphemy, exceed in numbers by far those who are inclined to modify this literalism. We shall not relinquish our right to think. As we read the story of our religion's gowth we believe ourselves entitled to this prerogative. For according to our apprehension of the genius of Judaism we deem liberty of thought its distinguishing and vital attribute. Many of the greatest of its teachers have exercised this privilege, and have thus blazed the path for others that would

tread in their footsteps. We cannot for reasons already explained allow that miracles, however well attested, prove anything. Our belief in God and our interpretation of His nature is of too high an order and too reverent a spirit to dethrone him and make him the occupant of the low station of a tinker. His creation was perfect from the beginning, his laws self-given, adequate. Miracles would detract from his majesty. Their acceptance implies less of God-belief than their rejection. We, therefore, reject them.

But we are withal not of one mind with the numerous would-be wise, who calmor that the Bibilical stories are silhouettes cut out by men of unsound mind. The marvelous representations of happenings are not free inventions. Nor are they reports of actual occurrences embellished wickedly for some selfish purpose or innocently in order to point a moral lesson, by some recorder or deceiver. This is indeed the view of rationalists of whatever variety. Some of their clan have thought of saving the letter of the story by disrobing it of its poetry. That Moses wrought the deeds reported of him they never doubt. He turned a staff into a serpent, he divided the Red Sea, he smote the rock and drew therefrom water. But, say they, while the people of Pharoah were misled by appearances to credit him with supernatural powers, and therefore were induced to listen to his words, in reality he performed his tricks in a perfectly natural manner. His staff was of the order of prepared tools which masters of the art of sleight of hand know how to handle to good effect; he had studied the natural phenomena of Egypt's river; he had observed that at a definite period of the year the father of the country, the Nile, carried in its muddy embrace large quantities of the red sand swept from off the

Abyssinian mountains, and relying upon this annual flow of ruddy slime he utilized the first appearance thereof to frighten Pharoah into the illusion that the Nile's waters had been turned into blood. Jacob did not wrestle with an angel, no, his antagonist in that memorable night was a disguised robber. The first-born in Egypt were not slain by the angel of death making his saddening rounds at the unsprinkled doors of Pharaoh's subject, no, they fell a victim to the cruelty of Arab tribes whom Moses had hired to carry out his final threat hurled into the stubborn king's teeth.

In this wise, rationalism attempted to save the credibility of the Bible. If the holy writings of Israel can escape rejection as historical records only by such heroic treatment as this, had they not better court extinction? They would certainly save their dignity and that of their great heroes. Here Moses is reduced to the role of a mountebank, a deceiver, a murderer. What asinine creatures must they have been who were "taken in" by such cheap tricks as these. Had Pharoah never seen the Nile run red with Abyssinian sands? If Moses had, the king certainly had observed the phenomenon as well. And how did the Arabs know in their pillaging incursion which of the inhabitants happened to be the first-born? Did they stop to insist upon seeing the birth certificate, or did they cross-examine the mothers in order to establish the primogeniture of their victims? These and a thousand similar questions might be put to show how bunglingly the rationalist proceeds to save the letter of the Bible. The attitude of the honest believer is at least reverential, that of the rationalist frivolous beyond sufferance. Religion and the Bible both might exclaim: May a good Lord preserve us against such

friends, of our enemies we shall be able to take care unaided.

Less flippant and less arrogant than this species of self-admiring rationalists, but equally unscholarly and unbearable is that variety of theirs that never tires of contending that with intentions of either a good or an evil kind Moses and the other writers of the Biblical accounts misrepresented as marvelous, simple natural occurrences though they knew in their hearts of hearts that their description did not do justice to the events. The difference between this and the former set of rationalists lies in the admission that the fraud upon others is perpetrated not in the act of performance so much as in the posterior proclamation thereof. Nevertheless under this view Moses is a deceiver. He "makes God speak" and "leads the people to believe that God has spoken," when he knows that he himself is the author of the laws which he has proclaimed as divine. It is true he does not perform his circus pranks before Pharoah, but the waiting people outside are told by him that a serpent had been turned into a staff and vice versa. This method of explaining the miracles as afterthoughts of the writers who report them has very justly lost all cast and standing today in the forum of science and scholarship. We may safely leave it to its well earned rest. In Germany no seriously minded person will do it so much honor as to remember it, though with us now and then a fossil of this extinct order may expose its nudity in open daylight.

Still another sect of rationalists deserves a passing word. More earnest than its predecessors along these dusty roads of forced interpretations under the mistaken belief that the painful effort will save the Bible and also do justice to the insistences of reason. this lat-

ter day variation of the school imputes no immoral or questionable motives to the Biblical reporters. It would have the stories pass as accounts of real occurrences. But what of the miraculous they appear to carry, is traced to the occult treacheries of the human brain. Dreams, hallucinations, autohypnotic processes are charged with having produced the effects which moulding the temper and modifying the outlook of the recorder forced his pen into grooves ignored by the sober-minded. The voices which the prophet claims to have heard were in so far real as he in his state of exaltation actually and honestly heard them; the waters actually oozed out of the rock, but the intense anxiety of the thirsting people blinded their eye to the fact that Moses had no part in the opening of the hidden spring. From the subjective point of view of the authors, the event took place exactly as they described it. They were not false to the truth as they saw it when they ascribed ordinary happenings to the intervention of supernatural power.

It requires no long explanation to prove that this new phase of rationalism has caught a few whiffs of the spirit of modern methods and results. The subjective element certainly has played a part in the coloring of old documents and their contents. The prophetic idiosyncrasy roots to a large extent in the regions of the subconscious. Nor is it to be disputed that for many of the Biblical stories there is the basis of actual fact. But these admissions do not cover the whole field. There are limitations to the applicability of these factors. To reduce the experience of Jonah to the precipitate of a dream will neglect the palpable certainty that the book which bears the prophet's name is itself a parable into which has been worked one of the class of

legends that are known as wanderers. The jewel casket of many a nation's folklore exhibits this very gem; under many a clime and in many a tongue the fable is rehearsed of a singer or sage who escaped a watery grave by the kindness of a finny denizen of the deep. The framework of the Biblical story deserves no greater credit for correspondence with an actual occurrence than do the sister saga's of other climes. And if mental processes to which the brain lends itself in moments of intense excitement throw all the light which we desire and can get on the mystery of the prophetic gift, we lose the discriminating moment to distinguish the true prophet from his namesake serving Baal.

The seers whose words have aroused the ages and still have not ceased stirring the conscience of even our day, drew their inexhaustible power indeed from other sources than the potency to dream or to invite visions. Theirs was an insight not so much into the hidden mysteries of unexplored nature as into the depths of human passion, the motives of human conduct, the relations that should subsist between man and man. Theirs was not merely the wealth of subjective illusions frequent and universal indeed in the days when the lines between the personal and the impersonal, the natural and the supernatural were as yet not definitely established. No, they were not wonder-workers, and their message depended not for its vital importance upon the corroborating testimony of uncanny and weird inversions of the usual sequence of natural happenings. They were messengers of righteousness, their burning words carried in their own fire the credentials of a truth which to deny implies the denial of man's dominant and central position among the things created. Of the earlier prophets,—

shadowy outlines of pushing energies in days of stress and strain rather than warm-blooded and high-towering personalities,—miracles are indeed recorded. Elijah and Elisha appear in the annals of the people's traditions as men of supreme control over life and grave.

To rationalize about these heroic figures will not save their historic character while it will reduce to weak prose the strong poetry of their biographies. Nature hates a vacuum, so does history. The vast ranges of time of which no definite person can be made the sponsor, centuries, however and generally under the strain of ideas and conflicts that in their outcome affect most vitally all future days, tradition loves to populate with one or two strong individualities in whose life and labor are crystalized the aspirations of their generation travailing in the birth-throes of the nobler faith. Such personalities may indeed be elaborations of actual men of flesh and blood who walked and worked on earth. An Elijah may have lived, but if he did he was not the giant, the figure of whom popular tradition has carved less out of the rude stone of the hero's real life than out of the finer marble of the new nation's and the new religion's and the new love's incipient strength which during the period covered by the magnified hero's life began to take form and assume influence. Such figures representing vital movements are always clothed by popular fancy with the purple of supernatural rulership. Israel's chronicles are not the only ones that exhibit this tendency. It is the universal phenomenon, in Greece and Rome no less than in India and the Northlands.

For religion and certainly for our religion the question of the actuality and the historicity of the Biblical miracles and the Biblical miracle workers is inconse-

quential. Religion does not depend upon facts, it is itself the stupendous and supreme fact. Even if miracles had the force of proving the divinity of him who performs them, a force which they have not, Judaism abhorring the confusion between the supremely divine and the human in the sense that God has ever assumed body and form, is not interested in the vindication of the truth as history of whatever report of miracles the documents contain. Significant in this connection is the catalogue of heresies which some of the authorities of rabbinical theology have taken pains to register. In none of them do we find the suggestion that rejection of miracles will bar the way to the enjoyments of honors in the gift of the religious community.

And we have warrant most ample for the proposition that rabbinical interpreters were exceedingly free in their treatment of Biblical miracles. Maimonides and others insist upon the acceptance of the doctrine of creation out of nothing, the recognition of prophecy, or as we probably might say revelation, and the belief in the resurrection of the dead. The first and the last in rabbinical argumentation are virtually one. The God who creates by the power of his word, reason the doctors of the school, has certainly the power to recreate the body crumbled into dust. A study of Maimonides theory of prophecy will show without much straining of points that the great master had notions which are not very far removed from naturalism, certainly much nearer to it than to supernaturalism.

It goes without saying that our theology has progressed beyond that of Maimonides or other mediæval authorities. We have no scruple to reject the belief in the miracle of the resurrection; our doctrine concerning *creatio ex nihilo* is a postulate of our concept of the

deity and not the outcome of our belief in the cosmogeny of Genesis. There would thus remain for us only the miracle of revelation or prophecy. It is true in our pulpits the word revelation is by no means a stranger. They that use it are doing so in the full knowledge of the fact that they connote therewith an idea *toto coelo* different from that which would have it stand for the ONE event associated in Biblical history with Sinai. Truth is, indeed, not of the dust. He who finds it feels that he has had but little part in its discovery. In this sense the word revelation may apply without too much violence to the unfolding of truth in Israel through the mediation of those men of religious genius whom we have come to designate as the prophets. In any other sense however, we do not accept the theory that religion is based on revelation. How so a cosmic God with whom to associate human form was even declared by Maimonides to be blasphemy can enter into a mechanical communication with Moses and descend to speak with him on earth is certainly beyond the limits of our comprehension. The ancient philosophers of Judaism felt this difficulty. The possession of a voice presupposes the existence of a body to produce sound. God having no body can have no voice. For this reason it was assumed that the channel through which God's words flowed to earth was a voice created especially for this service.

Rabbi Jose (Sukkah 5, a) contends that Moses never ascended to heaven and God never descended to earth. Though in the subsequent halakhic discussion this statement is modified to prove a point of interest in the fixations of the dimensions of the ritually correct tabernacle, the boldness of the teacher's utterance evidences the flexible character of the doctrine of mechanical rev-

lation. And none can be blind to the significance of the rabbinical provision against the adoption of what they declared arch-heresy, the doctrine that the Decalogue had the sanction of revelation in a higher degree than any other part of the law. (Berakhoth 12.) Revelation as a mechanical process would indeed be a miracle and as such as ineffective to prove truth as any other marvelous occurrence. If the human mind is able to grasp the truth revealed, revelation is unnecessary; if the human mind lacks this power, revelation is to no purpose. Pedagogical psychology understands full well that instruction to be effective can only consist in rational guidance of the productive functions of the mind. What the mind is unable to produce no teaching can impart. It might as well be mere sound and will have as much power to affect men and their conduct as mere sound would have. Biblical history corroborates this experience of sound pedagogy. Israel moulds the golden calf immediately after the proclamation of the second commandment. For all practical purposes Sinai might have remained silent. Lessing's view of the function of revelation as an accelerated process of origination through instruction might save the general doctrine if we were not constrained to ask what the Sinaitic revelation contained that had not been known before its occurrence, or that some other nations though not the recipients of the divine message from on high were left in ignorance of.

Abraham, if we must believe the Biblical documents, was a monotheist; so was Moses. The great patriarch's monotheism is regarded by the rabbinical authorities as the outflow of his own reasoning. (Maimonides Hilkhoth Akkum I, 3.) If he could arrive at this truth without mechanical revelation, why should others re-

quire the supernatural instruction? The Greek thinkers and writers of the fourth century are clearly entitled to be classed among monotheists. Confucius emphasized the moral precepts contained in the two tables as strenuously as they did, and so did the Egyptian book of the dead. It would then appear that the proclamation of the Decalogue on Sinai was, as far as the people to whom it was addressed were concerned, bootless, and as far as other nations come into consideration, a work of superarrogation. And which of the versions of the Decalogue was the one which threw the mountain into spasms? Can we seriously take refuge in the assumption that the fourth commandment was in its two-fold form proclaimed in the one and the same breath?

It has been argued that upon the Decalogue as revealed rest the notions of right which civilization has everywhere adopted and which will dissolve at once should we conclude that Moses did not receive the two tables in the manner outlined in holy Scripture. This argument is the weakest of the many weak ones to bolster up an untenable because irrational theory. The Biblical account of the first murder assumes that Cain feels his guilt. Without revelation he was aware of the crime involved in his act. The "sons of Noah" are certainly before the proclamation of the Sinaitic law by all rabbinical theologians represented as under moral obligations. An original revelation to Adam cannot be read into the Biblical texts. (Confer against Sanhedrin 56 b. Na'hmanides on Lev. XVIII.) The Romans had a clear and comprehensive "Rechtsbegriff" though they did not know of the (hypothetical) existence of the God-given law. And moreover are the principles of right enunciated in the Decalogue not barely formal and rudimentary? Thou shalt not murder, gives us no

information on what the law covers. Savage tribes may also accept the principle but construe it to have no applicability to the member of a foreign community. In fact the Pentateuch itself is forced to reckon with the institution of blood revenge. The bare enunciation of this law does not furnish us a sufficient basis of right. Nor does the Decalogue tell us what property is; it leaves us in the lurch when we would know what to consider adultery. Polygamy flourished after the proclamation of the Decalogue; this is proof that the empty prohibition of adultery was very far from spreading the foundations of absolute law which is, we suppose, what Dr. Wise means when speaking of the "Rechtsbegriff."

Or shall we restrict our view of revelation to the operation of the divine element in the prophets? Consulting the Talmudic authorities one cannot but hold that these teachers of our religion allowed a wide latitude of opinion on this moot point. The personal character of the recipient of prophetic power is by no means a negative factor. Purity of life, fear of sin are said to lead to the outpouring of the "holy spirit." (J. Sabbath I, 3; Shir ha-Shirim Rabba editio 1554, 3 a.) Teachers of the Torah are credited with the possession of the holy spirit. That the individual disposition and conditions of the prophets modify the manifestations of this "divine element" is a ready concession in rabbinical exegesis. (Confer Sanhedrin 89, a; 'Hagiga 13, b.) Men like Rabbi 'Helbo, reporting an utterance of R. Jochanan, and R. Simeon b. Lakish, had no very high opinion of prophecy, and, in fact, wisdom was considered to represent a higher stage of religious illumination than the prophetic vision. (Midrash Ekha Rabba; Sabbath 119, b.)

In accordance with Biblical precedent Moses is as-

signed an exceptional station among the prophets by the rabbis. And yet when we analyze their views on the channels through which Moses received the revealing message, we cannot but conclude that they inclined very strongly to the opinion that his own mind was the constituting and determinating factor of the revelation of which he was the mouth-piece. (Maimonides, Yesodhe Hattorah VII, 6; Ibn Esra to Num. VII; Siphri to Lev. I, 1).

As Judaism never accepted Tertullian's *credible est quia ineptum est,* the miracle of revelation even cannot be elevated to a plane higher than that to be assigned to others. Truth is truth no matter how enunciated, when and where and by whom. Twice two equals four, no divine voice can change the result or lend additional verity to the statement. That the square erected on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle equals the sum of squares of the other two sides remains true without revelation and cannot be vitiated by never so solemn a divine proclamation of the contrary.

Right is right under all circumstances, and if man is unable to distinguish between right and wrong without revelation he will be as incompetent after its intervention. For the human mind can only act upon motives which lie within the sphere of its own cognition. Such motives and the standards by which to judge them the human mind can either always grasp of its own strength, or it cannot grasp them at all, and in this case not act upon them. Nor can God be proven by revelation. Either the God-idea lies within the range of the human mind's possibilities, and then revelation is unnecessary, or it does not, and then revelation will not bring us one inch nearer to its comprehension so as to make it a vital force in our life and thought.

Moreover, if miracles prove truth, every form of religion is by virtue of such corroboration entitled to be held true. For every religion claims by its documents, or in the belief of its devotees, to be of divine origin. Of every religious teacher the working of miracles is recorded. And these are as well authenticated as are those of which the Bible has the record. Moses and Jesus, Mohammed and Buddah, not to mention others, are credited with the performance of identical operations. To say that those remembered of Moses are more trustworthy than others is not admissible. For recent literary researches in the history of religious tradition have established beyond the possibility of cavil the fact that none of the Old Testament historical books are the children of the times of which they purport to give us a detailed account. Even if we would agree to the proposition of Maimonides that the miracles wrought by Moses are in so far more credible than those of the prophets after him, since they were performed in the plain sight of eye-witnesses, we should have to relinquish the argument in view of the indisputable circumstance that none of our documents is contemporaneous with the men supposed to have been eye-witnesses.

Judaism as a religion has no concern with the efforts to save as authentic the Biblical stories. We may without fear of endangering the foundations of our faith subject the old documents, children of religion and not its parents, as as they are, to the processes of analysis which furnish us an insight into the architecture and character of the Homeric poems or the Vedic hymns or the composition of the Koran. Under the lens of the critic, miracle will appear to belong to the region of myth.

Says Dr. Einhorn, "The miracles which the Biblical books describe as far as they are not memories of natural occurrences belong to the territory of legend. (Ner Tamid, p. 37.)" Myth, said Hegel, is of all true statements of truth the truest. If it does not tell us what has happened, it informs us what should have happened, if certain principles are the determinants of the universe. With but slight modification we may admit this dictum of the bold German dialectician. Indeed, they are strangers even in the anti-chamber of the human soul's workshop who believe that myth and untruth are exchangeable terms. No myth is a free invention unless it be of that class of myths which are called secondary. Whenever a myth is the original outburst of a people's thought, it is the irresistible utterance of the people's poetic apperception of the events which it estimates to be of vital import in its own destiny; when it recites the story of a personal life, as often it does, it is the reflection of the people's highest ambitions, or the reconstruction of its own life in the form of an individual trial or triumph.

The myths or miracles in the New Testament are indeed, to a great extent, secondary or derivative. That Elijah and Moses are virtually one and the same personal precipitate of the nation's reconstructive poetry, of the nation's constructive period, the Talmudists have already detected. They enumerate nearly one hundred similarities of event and performance in the recorded biographies of these two pioneer prophets. And, indeed, both figures are the incarnation of the struggles which the nation underwent in its slow advance from tribal henotheism and Canaanitish polytheism to a more refined and ethical Yahwism. Carmel and Sinai are both the local background and the foci of that contest.

No wonder, then, that the miracles told of one in some form or another are woven into the life of the other. In the biography of these two men we are confronted with the spontaneous production of the mythopoetic creative faculty of the nation. It is the people, inquiring into its own history and destiny, that presides at the loom on which the miraculous thread and web is spun. Not so in the gospels. Here the artificiality of the method is at once apparent. The purpose to constitute the Nazarene the greater Moses and Elijah is patent. Every miracle wrought by Amram's son is also performed by Mary's child, but always in a heightened degree.

Leaving to one side these secondary miracles or myths we shall find in the Old Testament representatives of every variety of myth that we have discovered in our study of non-Biblical folk-poetry or literature. Let us not be afraid of placing our Bible into this company where to be is its by right of similarity of origin and method of composition and compilation. The Bible is literature, the literature of a highly gifted people; literature covering a millenium reflecting the various moods of the national soul and preserving the successive stages of its sponsors' development and growth into the realization of their national dower and destiny. As such literature of an ancient people the Bible cannot be expected to be the text-book of geology or astronomy or to have anticipated the discoveries in our physical or physiological laboratories. It is not even a manual of history; for the ancient nations did not write history as we do. But as such literature it has a value which no other estimate of its character can confer upon it. The soul of its parent-people glows in every line thereof. From that soul was mined the gold of the passion for

righteousness which is the *Leitmotif* of its mature message to the world, a message which has aroused the zones to joyful echo and is today, as it was of old, the tonic chord in the faith of humanity's best and purest.

If this literature frames myths which as records of actual events we shall not accept, its value is thereby not impaired. Its very myths breathe the spirit which has enkindled with life its every note.

Of nature-myths we find but a limited number in this literature. The book of Job and one or the other psalm show traces of their currency among the Hebrews. But we have a goodly representation of what is denoted as culture-myths. The change from the civilization of the hunter to the superior conditions of the Nomad's pursuits is enclosed in the relation between Essau, the starving huntersman, and Jacob, the shepherd, who is well warded against hunger. The transformation of the shepherd into a farmer, successful only after repeated abortive efforts comes to light in the story of Abel's murder at the hands of Cain. Tribal qualities and antipathies have also informed many an incident. Is not Jacob the typical shrewd Semitic shepherd? And is not Abraham the incarnation of another and nobler type still now found in the black tents of the Bedouin? The migrations of the patriarchs are personified movements of clans. They are credited with erecting altars which enjoyed high repute among the people even in days when the stricter Yahwism of later development would question the legitimacy of these ancient shrines. Moab and Ammon, arch-enemies of the sons of Israel, are charged by tribal myth with incestuous origin. Now it is a name that no longer understood gives rise to a story; anon it is a verse of some ditty or rhyme

come down the ages that evokes the explanatory event. Samson's life teems with incidents of this kind.

A festival which has grown up naturally and has in its development from a pastoral feast into a day appealing through a changed ritual to an agricultural people, kept pace with the evolution of the nation's culture would be connected with an important and decisive crisis in the history of the clans. And spontaneously the mythopoetic faculty responds to the impulse. Advancing civilization does not blur the memory of the ruder habits and rites of former days, a strange custom or festal song has, perhaps, served to fix the former practice in the economy of certain localities. What may have been the provoking event? Jephta's daughter's fate illustrates in its composite character of the therewith associated story this class of myths. It would account for a rhyme and a festival dear to the maidens of the district and in so doing fossilizes the old rite of human sacrifice and even weaves into the many-threaded pattern of its tradition one of the wandering legends, the Hebrew counterpart to the Greek of Iphigenia. And is Samson not also of this order, the Hebrew Hercules, the sun-hero? Does not proverb and rhyme and name furnish the irritant for the free activity of the myth-weaving fancy in stories illustrative of the life and the labors of the forebears? Locality is also a fertile source. The bleak and desolate region of the Dead Sea challenges the harmonizing propensities of folk-fancy.

Every nation under God's sun has so accounted for desolate wastes. Let no one reck them recollections of great geological cataclysms. Vineta is the Baltic version of Sodom and Gomorrha. This fancy is free of the burden of complying with nature's rigid inflexi-

bility. When it was in its prime and therefore most productive, it looked upon nature as a congeries of personal volitions, unhampered by such laws as we have detected to hold stars and stones and rocks and rivers under impartial dominion. Animals speak, and why should they not? A generation but little removed from the influences of the Totem age could not feel the difficulties therein involved. The medicinal value of a brass serpent, the curative effect of representative gold mice and bubos are precipitates of the Totem age and the reflection of its convictions. Fairy tales also have deputies in this congress of myths. Elisha's bear devouring the mocking children is of one of these. That myth is often faithful to local coloring, as for instance in the description of the Egyptian plagues, need not astonish us. Poetry mixes its colors very frequently in accordance with the pattern which nature furnishes. He who wrote the epos of the Exodus or reduced it to written form was not ignorant of Egypt's circumstances. His *systematic* disquisition, however, bears the earmarks of having been worked out in the solitude of his study, his intention is clearly to controvert the theology of the Pharaoh's; he gives us neither history nor mythology, but theology.

But I must hasten to the conclusion. One word has to be said which often is neglected. Underneath this mythology of the Bible pulsates still another force. *The Midrashic method has inspirited the Bible.* Originally the spontaneous outpouring of unconcerned national reminiscences and ambitions, the literature of Israel passed at a later epoch through a reconstructive process. In this way its contents were enriched with the added significance of being witnesses to the universal reign of those principles of righteousness which con-

stitute the burden of Israel's message to the ages. Almost every life and every story was re-adjusted to the demands of this higher outlook. Israel had become at last the people of priests, the one nation reading its national duty in terms of service to the one God, a service which demanded obedience and love, not sacrifices. The Bible was heightened from literature into *the* book of religious instruction.

Every stage of the nation's growth into and toward the light had left its imprint upon the manner and matter of popular tradition. This final climax recast the material once more. And the later Midrash followed in the footsteps of the Biblical Midrash. How beautifully, for instance, is the story of Israel's wandering in the desert applied in the homilies of the rabbis. The story of the divine protection and guidance by a pillar of fire at night and a cloud by day, is undoubtedly the offspring of the method employed by the tramping tribes to beacon the direction to the long drawn column. Modern writers on the marching arrangements of the pilgrim lines on their way to Mecca have recalled the Biblical scene. The Mannah, too, has for its basis the occurrence of a resinous shrub in the peninsula and the burning bush of Moses holds for its nucleus of fact the existence of another shrub native to those regions. But both Bible and Midrash have done better than to dwell upon these germs and to point to them in proof of the veracity of their records. They have made the miracle the vehicle of moral instruction, a new and nobler poetry built on the old.

The prose of the camp-lights, or the moving cloud of dust, or of the secretions of a tree, or the fiery blossoms of a shrub or the roar of the volcano, ancient seat and center of tribal worship, has been transformed into the

peal of God's own voice, into lessons of divine guidance and human trust which are true forever. This truth we cherish. It needs no confirmation by miracles, it is its own recorded witness, its own prophet and revelation. The pages of the unfolding centuries are a scroll continuous, each line of which echoes the one thought of every miracle turned into a Midrash:—God reigneth, his dominion embraces all the worlds and is without end. This faith will not parent miracles. It had found its voice before Sinai was believed to have thundered and should Sinai cease to be awful as the theater of theophanies it would still ring on.

Myth or miracle for this confidence in the essential righteousness of the universe and the duty of man to strive after righteousness are *indifferent* alternatives. Before the forum of literature and scholarship miracle belongs to the realm of myth but religion, our religion spurns the crutches of a more limited assurance, it rejects the belief in miracles not because it would have less of God, no, because it has more of him. God's law is not in heaven, it is not beyond the sea, but in our mouth and our heart *to do it.*

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